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THE FUNCTION OF EDUCATION IN ABOLISHING CHILD LABOR

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Reforms of the abuses of child labor are accomplished by two methods: compulsion and attraction. The factors in the problem are three,—the employer, the parent and the child. The beginnings of social activity against child labor in this as in other countries, have been largely by repressive measures. Perhaps this is necessarily so, though it would be unfortunate to regard them as other than initial steps.

Gradually and almost unnoticed the employment of children, many of them extremely young, has become a part of our industrial system. This was not, we believe, because of any abnormal excess of greed or cruelty, as often charged, but by the operation of a natural economic law coupled with the general lack of public recognition that America has ceased to be exclusively an agricultural country and has become intensely industrial. The sturdy farmer, merchant or professional man, who boasts himself the glorious example of all child labor because he went to work at eight years old and has been self-supporting since, for many years dominated the situation. His assumption that all child labor is to be promoted because work on the farm or in the country store, or in his father's or neighbor's office was a benefit to him, expresses the point of view of a large number of our citizens towards a system grown to such proportions that, by the latest census estimates not less than 688,207 children under sixteen, 186,358 of whom are under fourteen years of age, are in industries other than agricultural.

This report, acknowledged by the Census Bureau to be imperfect because of lack of facilities for collecting accurate data, has practically omitted some industries in which child labor is particularly involved. For example, a recent report of the Bureau of Labor in New York State shows a large number of children, some as young as four or five years, employed in the various home industries in New York City, whereas none of these children under

ten years are reported by the Census Bureau. Twelve cities are shown in the census to have 668 newsboys. None are reported for other cities. But by returns we have just received from authentic sources in thirty-three cities, there are now not less than 17,000 children engaged as newspaper carriers and newsboys, many of them as young as six and eight years of age. The City of Boston alone shows three times as many as the census reports for the entire United States.

Legislation Necessary

Obviously, with such a condition facing society, adding every year several thousand youth to the army of those unfitted for any but the most unskilled and precarious occupations, it has been necessary to seek measures that shall be more immediately effective than the tardy general appreciation of the proper use of the years of childhood. Among the first activities of the National Child Labor Committee was a careful and systematic field study in a number of sections and in various industries, of the extent of child labor and the specific conditions in which many children are employed. Although the reports we have collected frequently disprove the sensational stories of cruelty and oppression that have so often shocked the credulous, they have confirmed the convictions of school officials and other interested authorities, and the reports of serious students in earlier days. The net revelation of the various investigations has been sufficient to convince legislators of the necessity of putting a legal check on the system without waiting for a complete and scientific arraignment of the evil. The result has been that at present, in every state of the Union, with one exception, some form of legal prohibition or regulation of child labor has been enacted.

Nor have these legislative acts been adopted against the united protest of those representing the industries affected. There is a growing disposition among employers, who recognize the short-sighted policy of child employment, to seek the aid of society in bringing their competitors up to their own higher standards.

Many prohibitions secured have been chiefly based on a sense of pity for the wrongs of childhood, but more recently society is becoming conscious that her first asset, citizenship, is being weakened, and next in importance, industry is being cheapened

and impaired. These larger social aspects are being constantly made more prominent in attempts to secure legislative prohibition of child labor, or its more complete regulation. Through public interest, the beginnings of which date from the earlier activities of trade unions, women's clubs, consumers' leagues and many earnest individual workers, there have been enacted important child labor laws in the past four years in thirty-four states. In the legislative sessions of 1906-07, eighteen states enacted new laws or revised existing laws. Eight of these states are Southern. Since January 1st, 1908, important changes in these laws have passed the Legislatures of Ohio, Kentucky, Virginia, Mississippi and Oklahoma,¹ while important bills are pending in New York, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Jersey and the District of Columbia.

Compulsory School Laws

But despite this somewhat formidable record of legislative enactments, we must not be misled. The end we seek, namely, adequate preparation of the American child for citizenship, is not attained, but only made possible of attainment by such prohibitions; and it is significant that although child labor laws reduce the number and force an improvement in the condition of working children, the field of usefulness of such measures is limited by their repressive nature. By multitudes of people affected, whether employers, parents or children, these laws are resented and looked upon as detrimental, while a small army of officials is required to secure their enforcement against the connivance of these three interested factors.

In most instances this negative has been accompanied by positive legislation for compulsory school attendance. In all the states having child labor laws, compulsory school attendance laws have been enacted, except in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. That such laws are effective is strikingly attested by the steady growth of the number of commonwealths adopting them.

In 1870 less than 5 per cent. of the population were subject to compulsory school laws. To-day over 72 per cent. are subject to these laws. But this fact is of slight significance compared with the distribution of the benefits of public education. The

¹Oklahoma bill vetoed by the Governor June 10th.

United States Department of Education in 1900 reported that over 50 per cent. of all public school pupils were in the first and second grades and were less than nine years of age; 87.5 per cent. were in the first five grades and under twelve years of age. Referring to the amazing achievement of a system of education which enrolls over 16,000,000 pupils and is maintained at an annual expense of over \$300,000,000, the Commissioner of Education in his report for 1908 says:

The mere ability to read and write indicates, however, a very slight remove from crass ignorance, and a large proportion of our people are in danger of stopping at this point. The early withdrawal of pupils from school is a fact universally recognized, although up to this time there have been few systematic investigations as to the extent and the causes of the evil. Such investigations as have been attempted relate to particular cities, differing widely in respect to growth and movement of population. It is, however, significant that they all indicate a marked decline in school attendance between the fourth and fifth school years or grades, and continued decrease thereafter.²

The findings of the Massachusetts Commission on Industrial and Technical Education have been largely quoted. They are significant of what may be expected to occur in other states at the end of the compulsory school period. In Massachusetts there are 25,000 children between fourteen and sixteen not in school, five-sixths of whom did not complete the grammar school, one-half did not complete the seventh grade, and one-fourth did not complete the sixth grade.

Deserters from School

Charles F. Warner, Principal of the Mechanics' Arts School, Springfield, Mass., made the statement that from the army of 20,000,000 children attending the public schools of the United States during the school year ending 1907, there would be at least 5,000,000 deserters before the roll would be called at the beginning of the following school year. It is of the greatest importance to discover the cause of this desertion; why there is such a decrease in school attendance after the fourth grade; why such impatience for the last day of the compulsory school period to come; what the attractive feature out of school and upon what the deserting pupils enter.

The majority of these pupils become, temporarily or per-

²Report of Commissioner of Education for the year ending June 30, 1906.

manently, wage-earners, either from family necessity or because work promises to be less monotonous and irksome than school attendance. The responsibility seems to lie mostly with the child, for out of 3,157 families investigated, 76 per cent. could give the children industrial training and would gladly do so if it were offered. In many instances the parents were found to be spending, in supplementary lessons, such as commercial branches and music, as much as the child's income.

Wasted Years

This investigation also showed that these children's wages are of little value, for they seldom receive over five dollars a week before they are seventeen, and reach the maximum wage of eight to ten dollars at twenty years of age. It is estimated that for every one going into an occupation that has any advantages for the employee, four enter a cotton mill, or become messengers or cash girls. Moreover, it is rare that one goes from an unskilled to a skilled trade. Out of the fifty cases between seventeen and twenty years of age employed in Cambridge in skilled industries, only one had formerly been employed in unskilled labor, other than errand and office work. A boy is rarely found in printing houses who was formerly employed at other work, and this is true of mechanics, plumbers, painters, glass workers, plasterers, masons, and stone-cutters. A comparison was made of the aggregate wages at eighteen years of age, of children leaving school at fourteen and at sixteen. The results showed that even with the faulty education now afforded, the child of sixteen goes from school so much better equipped as a wage earner, that in two years his earnings aggregate more than those of the child who left school at fourteen and has been working four years.

Why do children leave school for such unsatisfactory and poorly-paid employment? The reason for the desertion from school seems mainly to be the positive dislike of school life and a wish to be active. Influenced by their companions, children have a strong ambition for money of their own. Our problem is to supply the attractive power in our educational system that will prove the complement of prohibitive legislation and compulsory elementary education. A compulsory elementary education which results in such distaste for school that children prefer to enter some unskilled

labor, which wastes from two to four years of adolescence for an insignificant wage and leaves them stranded at twenty, has missed the purpose of education. Some helpful facts they may have gleaned, but there has been little influence in shaping their life and ideals. The most common deduction from the investigations made is that "many of these children would be in school if the school promised preparation for some life pursuit."

Practical Education Demanded

The history of our educational system and its perfect adaptation to earlier needs in our civilization are well known, but we might as well face the fact that it is at present class education, for the great majority of our youth enter manual trades, while our schools are in the main furnishing only preparation for professional life.

In a recent paper, Dr. Paul Hanus describes our present educational system as "general," in contrast with the excellent system he advocates. In our judgment our schools are not providing a general education but a special class education. All the dominant characteristics of the regular school method tend to train children to avoid the occupations which command the services of at least ninety per cent. of our population, while they are urged by precept and example to eagerly seek the employments of the other ten per cent. The recruits for our industrial army receive comparatively little of the time or money expended upon our public schools.

Many steps are being taken in this direction, and educators are giving their best thought to the task of adapting our public school system to the needs of an industrial society. In 1890 only thirty-seven city school systems reported as having manual training. In 1906 there were five hundred and ten. Trade schools are being instituted in many cities and state legislatures are rapidly making appropriations for industrial and trade training.

The Commission on Industrial Education appointed in August, 1906, by Governor Guild of Massachusetts, is doing pioneer work. In general, the programs suggested by various educators are excellent, covering as they do the introduction into our elementary schools of practical work with an industrial bent; the multiplication and enlargement of high schools of the manual training type; the founding of trade schools which will provide vocational training

to bridge the chasm between fourteen and sixteen, when so many enter unskilled industries; and continuation schools to serve the needs of those who have already entered industry with meagre preparation.

Anything is admirable that will make our schools a part of real life and impress upon parents and children their practical, helpful character to such a degree that the family will prefer to sacrifice the pittance that might be received for unskilled labor, in order that opportunity may be given to prepare for larger usefulness and remuneration. There are some families in which this sacrifice would be impossible because of poverty. In every such instance, in the interest of the commonwealth, the assistance must be given either by private or public aid. The question as to the limit of social responsibility is a mere quibble. When society dictates that every child shall be educated it must bear the responsibility involved.

Training the Consumer

Every such program should prepare the worker for intelligent consumption, as well as skilled production. It has been said that all our training to-day is a training for consumption. If that is true, it is a most unintelligent training. Every worker during his vocational training should have an opportunity to learn something of the demands and conditions of labor in other industries. Only so can he be fitted for intelligent democratic citizenship, for wise sympathy with fellow-workers, and for an appreciation of work, and the place of the worker in the social scheme. Workers thus trained would not tolerate the inequality of profits to the actual producer and the middle-man, so strikingly demonstrated at the recent Congestion Exhibit in New York City.

They would also demand efficient workmanship and honest service. Whatever the phases through which society may pass, the purpose of education is constant—intelligent citizenship. In a society pre-eminently industrial, the education must be along industrial lines, but if it ends merely in the acquirement of a handicraft it is a failure. Along with the industry there must be training toward lofty industrial ideals. If we could train the coming generation to revolt against shoddy, tawdry, faulty goods, we should have some hope for the steady elevation of our industries to a higher plane. The manufacturer is forced by competition to cater to the

majority demand, and quantity is the popular goal. The true craftsman who is dissatisfied with the dishonest results of the speeding which reduces himself and his fellows to machines has at present one recourse,—he can quit. What is demanded is training for the entire group to which this craftsman belongs. The very class of people who do the shoddy work buy that kind of goods. This is partly due to their cheapness, for the average mechanic cannot afford the better. But the affront to his manhood, the insult to his wife and family, the social sin he commits by taking from the hands of the merchant at any price that which is devoid of all ideals of proportion, beauty, simplicity, honesty, or reasonable utility, does not occur to him.

Choosing an Occupation

The proper training of children is the main concern rather than the effect their training is to have on industries. What is required is not that our public schools shall be called into requisition to train experts in single specialized trades in order to lift the burden of expense from the employer, but that the children shall become so alert and well developed as to be fit for a choice of several opportunities.

A note of warning might be given from the recent suggestion of a noted educator that "the last two years of vocational training would include specialized instruction in the trades appropriate to a given locality." That is legitimate, if the trades that seem proper to the locality afford a fair opportunity for advancement in skill and in wages. Otherwise, the boys and girls should be so fitted by a knowledge of other occupations that their future and the future of their children can never be dominated by what may chance to be "the leading industry" of the community. Sometimes it is obvious to careful students that the dominant industries of a community are not such as offer the best opportunity for the development of skill and for advancement to self-support. In spite of this fact, is it not true that the movement toward manual training is too prone to accept the local situation as inevitable and seek to adjust itself rather than attempting to alter local conditions? For example, the mining of coal is a chief industry in Pennsylvania, but the child of the coal mining community instead of being absolutely predestined in his industrial career, should have presented to him an industrial

horizon broad enough to enable him to choose intelligently whether he will become a coal miner or engage in some other form of employment.

Industrial Training for Girls

Industrial training for girls presents some difficulties that do not appear in the case of boys. At the present time in the United States six million women are gainfully employed. Nearly one-third (30.6 per cent.) of all women between fifteen and twenty-four are so employed. "Statistics of Women at Work," Census Bureau 1907, gives figures that are startling. In seventy-two of the seventy-eight cities with 50,000 inhabitants, more than one-third of all the girls between sixteen and twenty years of age are at work. In thirty-six of these cities more than one-half are earning their living, and in eight the percentage rises from sixty-nine to seventy-seven per cent. of the total number of girls.

Woman in industry is not a new condition. But factory production has forced her out of her home if she would continue productive processes. Formerly, women and girls in the home could, if necessary, materially supplement the family income by producing nearly all the necessities. To-day, if they contribute to family needs, they must find employment elsewhere.

This advent of women into industry outside the home has brought about serious social complications. The standard of wages has undoubtedly been lowered, so that in many instances the whole family cannot earn what the head of the family should singly. Many hold this condition responsible for the general unfitness of the wage-earning woman for family duties and responsibilities, for the outside work she enters upon rarely offers any training that would make her an intelligent consumer. What shall be our attitude toward girls in industry? If it were wise, it would nevertheless be impossible to exclude them. The place they fill is perhaps suggestive of a remedy. They are found mainly, especially the younger ones, in unskilled trades, which do not afford a living wage and give no opportunity to learn a skilled trade. At present one of two courses is open to them: to remain where they constantly lower the wages of others, or enter a home of their own untrained in any particular for that responsibility.

Girls should be excluded by law from all trades which menace

their physical or moral well-being, and thus jeopardize the interest of the home and of future generations. The trades remaining should be carefully selected on the basis of labor demand, opportunities for advancing in efficiency and remuneration, and their effect upon womanly instincts and domestic tastes. In the trades thus selected, they should receive as careful industrial training as boys. Such a course would deter them from entering industry at an age and degree of preparation which forbid their becoming skilled laborers. The unskilled trade is often more vitiating to women from the social standpoint than to men. A boy, at least, looks upon industry as a permanent thing, and rarely fails to have some regard for his fellow workmen. The girl is apt to consider it as a temporary occupation and hence cares nothing for organization or any protective measures. More even than boys, the girl requires a course of training which would make her respect industry and her fellow-worker.

Domestic Service

But side by side with preparation for the trade she chooses, there should be adequate instruction in the subjects that vitally affect the home. She should receive some knowledge of productive processes in general, hygiene, decorative art in its relation to the home, and domestic science. The excuse made for not including domestic science in trade schools now existing is that girls do not desire to go into domestic service. It is preposterous that only those girls who are willing to enter such employment should receive this training. Society, in order to serve its own ends, should expect each girl to be mistress in her own home, and if industrial training is provided at all, should embody domestic science not as a fitting for remunerative occupation, but as preparation for home making. When it does not mark a girl as having chosen to be a domestic servant, undoubtedly many will choose such instruction and go out with loftier ideals of a home and with preparation for its responsibilities. The stigma now resting upon domestic science as being something necessary to be understood only by domestic servants, should be removed. Let us give all our girls the idea that home making requires scientific preparation, or else give up the theory that the home is especially woman's work. Incidentally, this might so develop the future directors of homes that they would

bring about conditions which would make domestic service a dignified and desirable trade.

Opposition to Public Trade Schools

There will undoubtedly be serious differences of opinion between the various factors in society before our educational system is developed on the new lines sufficiently to affect the situation. Both employer and organized workers are divided on the subject of trade schools under a system of public instruction.

The manufacturer doubts the efficiency of workers thus trained. This doubt cannot be removed by argument but only by a practical demonstration of the quality of workmanship. The equipment and instruction should be such that a certificate from a public trade school would mean that its holder lacks nothing that his trade calls for, save the celerity which comes only by practice. However, there is nothing to hinder the inauguration of factory trade schools when an industry so desires. Organized labor fears that the public trade school will flood the labor market and increase the sharpness of competition for work. But, as Robert A. Woods has observed, "it is inconceivable that as a class school-trained workmen should not be even more jealous than others of all unreasonable encroachments upon their wage standard, and that they should not apply their additional training to the development of even more effective forms of labor organization than now exist."

In facing the vast problem of proper education in a democracy, all private and class interests must be forgotten in the interest of the social good. Undoubtedly the manufacturer will profit by having the public, through the trade school, pay for training his recruits and bear the cost of the material now wasted by beginners. To make the employer and not the child the chief beneficiary of such a system, to make the newer education play into the hands of great industrial interests, would be a perversion of a splendid opportunity. But while this direct benefit to the employer is acknowledged, the trained worker and society in general will reap the chief advantage if industrial training is properly directed. The trained worker will cease to be menaced by the helpless and ignorant competitor, many times the child laborer, now so often the potent tool of the employer. Moreover, the trained worker, together with society at large, will reap the constant advantage of having offered for

purchase in the markets, honest products. The community will be relieved of the burden, now so heavy, of that multitude of dependents whose helplessness arises from ignorance and utter lack of training for any useful occupation. Best of all, the youth of our nation, if there is placed before them the opportunity to learn some one handicraft in its completeness, can never be crushed to the level of industrial machines. The methods pursued in this educational revolution must keep paramount the necessity of enhancing our most valuable social asset, human virtue and intelligence.

I bring this topic before you not in the expectation of adding to the wealth of suggestions already available in the program of industrial education, but that you may know that the National Child Labor Committee is content with no partial program for the elimination of child labor. Prohibitive legislation and compulsory elementary education open the door of opportunity for youth, but the education must be of such a character as to help the child by its attraction and lead him into such fields of skilled labor that in the education of his own children compulsion will cease to be necessary.